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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1806  
INFO RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6262  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1361  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1914  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1411  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 5820  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 2732

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001516

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/23/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: PARTIES PREPARE TO RESPOND TO BOUTEFLIKA'S  
PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

REF: A. ALGIERS 1308

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 1259

[1](#)C. ALGIERS 1249

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: While the vacationing President Bouteflika ponders what constitutional changes he will propose to voters in the fall, Algerian opposition parties (and the lone Islamist party in the presidential coalition) are preparing their reaction. The opposition Islah Party believes that any tinkering with the Algerian constitution designed to benefit the sitting president will do little to further democracy in the country, and has already announced its opposition to whatever plan Bouteflika submits. The largest Berber opposition party is similarly skeptical that much good will come from Bouteflika's initiative, believing that the French-style centralization and one-party control of government that have characterized Algeria since its independence will surely remain. The party is nonetheless withholding public comment on the amendments until President Bouteflika spells them out in September. While the presidential coalition parties will almost certainly support Bouteflika, the moderate Islamic party in the grouping is privately concerned that he might propose to eliminate the presidential term limit entirely -- something the party says it cannot support. Whatever form Bouteflika's proposed constitutional amendments take, the changes will almost certainly be adopted in the popular referendum, expected before the end of the year. End Summary.

BERBER OPPOSITION ASKS HOW MUCH DEMOCRACY WILL BE ALLOWED  
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[1](#)2. (C) Sa'id Saadi, the head of the predominantly Berber opposition party, "Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Democratie" (RCD), asserted August 21 that the referendum would not address Algeria's ills. In the RCD's view, the primary problems facing Algeria are one-party control, dating to Algeria's independence from France in 1962, and French-style government centralization. The referendum will remedy neither, Saadi told us. He fully expected a proposal that would allow Bouteflika to seek a third term in office, which the president would then use to run for re-election. While Saadi had nothing against the president personally, he noted that Bouteflika was part of the "old generation" that had won Algerian independence. In his view, Bouteflika and his peers were unsuited to modernize the country. They would not put automated teller machines, for example, on the streets of Algiers -- something Saadi recently found to his surprise in Libya, a country he viewed as more isolated than

Algeria until a short time ago.

13. (C) Saadi believed Bouteflika's health was a cause of concern for Algerians, and would oblige him to amend the constitution to create a vice presidency to reassure the public on succession. If Bouteflika proposed to put the president and VP on the same ballot for voter approval, Saadi said, his party would have no qualms with the reform. But he doubted that Bouteflika would permit the open selection of a vice president. Another widely expected amendment proposal would give the Senate power to amend and shape legislation. According to Saadi, the more important question was whether Bouteflika would change the constitution to end the ability of one-third of senators (the number appointed by the president) to block legislation supported by the majority. He was skeptical Bouteflika would allow that much democracy in the Senate, and was even more skeptical that the GOA would properly count the votes for the referendum. In that regard, Saadi showed PolEc Chief the officially published, Arabic-language results of the 2004 presidential election, pointing out that his personal vote total from two electoral districts exceeded his total national vote as listed elsewhere in the same publication. Even when the GOA tried to cheat, he remarked, it couldn't do it well.

MSP: PASSAGE A FOREGONE CONCLUSION

14. (C) In an August 22 meeting with PolEc Chief, the chief of staff to the leader of the moderate Islamist Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) said that his party would rather see abolition of the Emergency Law than enactment of constitutional reforms that would have little real impact on Algerian society. Nourredine Ait Nessaoudene averred that

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there was no question that Bouteflika was widely popular: whatever amendments to the constitution he proposed would pass. Like other members of the presidential coalition, the MSP had dutifully forwarded to Bouteflika its proposals for the constitutional referendum. Ait Nessaoudene believed that the president wanted to improve Algeria's international image, and thus would not propose constitutional reforms that would detract from his goal. The MSP was also confident that Bouteflika's proposed amendments would be "statesmanlike" and not reflect solely the views of the parliament's largest party, the FLN. Ait Nessaoudene admitted privately, however, that Bouteflika would put the MSP in a very uncomfortable position if he proposed to abolish term limits for the president. A third term for Bouteflika would suit the MSP, he said, but no limit to the president's tenure in office would be unacceptable.

ISLAH WILL OUTRIGHT OPPOSE ANY BOUTEFLIKA INITIATIVE

15. (C) Islah (Reform) Party head Abdallah Djballah told PolEc Chief August 22 that his party did not support yet another set of constitutional amendments designed to favor the sitting president. Djballah, whose Islamist party opposes the government's platform generally, maintained that Algeria needed strong democratic institutions such as a credible parliament and rule of law. Bouteflika's proposal -- whatever form it took -- would certainly not radically change the Algerian system. Djballah acknowledged that Bouteflika's constitutional amendments would be adopted, given the lack of transparency and democracy in Algeria. When only the presidential coalition parties had access to the electronic media and the voting process was manipulated by the government, he asked, what rational person would expect another outcome? Djballah said North Americans and Europeans were fortunate to live in societies that had strong democratic systems. He wanted to see true democracy take root in Algeria, but minor fixes to the Algerian constitution would not bring about such change.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: While the devil of any electoral proposal is in the details, we can safely predict even before Bouteflika presents his proposed constitutional amendments that the opposition parties will oppose his initiative and that the parties of the presidential coalition, like the MSP, will support it. We also agree with the MSP that Bouteflika's proposal is likely to be "statesmanlike" and address the MSP's concern about unlimited presidential terms. One thing on which all the key political players agree is that Bouteflika's proposed amendments will be adopted. All that matters now is what Bouteflika decides to include in his initiative.

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